

CAVALCADE OF COUNTIES: TERRESTRIAL CANAAN

Named for 'Peace' by Founder John Fenwick, Salem County Became Known as a 'Land of Milk and Honey'

BY JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

JOHN FENWICK gazed intently inland in the early Spring of 1675 as the English ship Griffin dropped anchor in a pleasant cove off Delaware Bay. Across the marshes occasional wisps of smoke curling through the trees bespoke of a few earlier arrivals scattered through the vast area Fenwick secured in 1673 from Lord Berkeley.

At least Fenwick thought the 1,000 pounds he had given Berkeley bought him the province of West Jersey. Now, after two years of trouble and litigation, Fenwick couldn't be sure. His troubled mind expressed itself when Fenwick stepped ashore.

"Its name shall be Salem," said Fenwick, thinking of the Hebrew word for peace.

For Fenwick, "Salem" was as much a prayer as an expression of the tranquility of the land.

Peace had been Fenwick's desire since his days as a major in the army of the ill-fated Oliver Cromwell. He embraced the Quaker faith after he left the army and listened with interest when people spoke of the new lands across the Atlantic Ocean. Thus, when Lord Berkeley offered to sell half the province of New Jersey, Fenwick grasped the chance. The price—

£1,000 and 40 beaver skins annually.

Soon the English courts judged Fenwick's purchase, investigating allegations that Edward Byllynge had used Fenwick as a front man in the purchase. Young William Penn, a Quaker like both Fenwick and Byllynge, sat in arbitration on the dispute—and decided in favor of Byllynge and his creditors. Fenwick lost all but an area embraced by the modern Salem and Cumberland counties (not a bad bit of real estate, at that).

FENWICK wrote Penn bitterly, but Penn urged him to put aside his rancor. "Fall closely to thy business," Penn advised, "lest thy grandchildren be in the other world before the land thou hast allotted be employed * * *"

So, Fenwick fell closely to his business in Salem. He bought the land from the Indians, for the usual guns and shot, rum and assorted articles of clothing. He laid out a wide street from the wharf on Salem River and saw his loved ones comfortably housed. He planned villages at Cohanzick (Greenwich) and Finn's Point.

Many more English Quakers joined the colony, lured by Fenwick's word pictures. Among other things, Fenwick assured prospective buyers that "if there be any terrestrial Canaan,

This is the seventeenth of a series of articles dealing with New Jersey's 21 counties, sketching their past and present with, now and then, a peek into their future. The counties will be considered in alphabetical order each week. Next Sunday: Somerset County.



Monument to John Fenwick, the founder, is on Salem's outskirts.



County Court House in Salem, erected 1908, replaced one of 1817.

'tis surely here, where the land floweth with milk and honey."

As settlers pushed outward they learned the story of the Swedes and Finns who arrived before 1640. They found traces of the New Haven Puritans who had unsuccessfully attempted settlement in 1641 along Salem Creek (25 years before establishment of the colony at Elizabethtown).

Already, however, time had dimmed memories of the 30-year struggle of the Dutch and Swedes for control of the Delaware River. Governor John Printz, bustling, able 400-pound Swedish leader, and the fort he had built at Elfsborg Point in 1643 were fading into history and legend. The story persisted that mosquitoes swarming over the marshes drove the Swedes from Fort Elfsborg before 1655—something Dutch guns couldn't do.

JOHN FENWICK had no time for legends. His English financial troubles returned to plague him in America. Many of his colonists began to entertain grave doubts concerning Fenwick's right to sell them land. Finally, in 1682, he conveyed to William Penn for 10 shillings "and other valuable considerations" all his land except 150,000 acres.

Salem never meant peace to John

Fenwick. When he died in December, 1683, he must have considered himself a failure. After all, for a man who once owned half of New Jersey, the 150,000 acres he had left seemed like a mere garden patch. His visions of building a great estate for his children evaporated; he didn't even leave a son to carry on his name. Fenwick's most lasting memorial is probably the fact that it was he who interested William Penn in America.

Had he not been sickened by his financial difficulties, Fenwick would have been overjoyed by the growth of Salem County. Mills sprang up along the numerous streams in the land of peace. Boats sailed up sinuous Salem Creek in sufficient numbers to enable it to become an official port of entry in 1682—a real plum for the little village.

Farming dominated the "terrestrial Canaan." In May, 1682, the first of Salem's famous country fairs started. Solemn Quaker folk ruled that during the fair, and for two days before and after, all persons were exempt from arrest. Such latitude induced evil—a 1698 law pointed out that "foreigners do flock in from other parts and do sell liquor by retail." That must stop, said the law. Only local folk could sell liquor, and just to keep everything



Du Pont's huge plant at Deepwater and Delaware Memorial Bridge.



Quaker Meeting House (left) at Woodstown, one of first buildings.

honest the law provided that any one who reported a foreigner selling liquor could keep half the confiscated stock.

THE land of peace had its violent crime and even more violent punishment. Salem, N. J., matched even the cruelest of the notorious Salem, Mass., punishments in 1717 when a young Negro slave woman was burned at the stake as an accomplice in the murder of her master.

Otherwise things moved placidly along in the days before the old Fenwick territory lost half its area by the establishment of Cumberland County in 1748. By then Salem County had several scattered villages, most of them along the winding creeks, which during most of the county's early days served as the only dependable highways. Many of Salem County's old houses still face the creeks, commemorating the days when the boat rather than the cart served to link settlers with other parts.

Most important of the early outposts was Wistarburg, the glass-making village built in 1739 by Casper Wistar of Philadelphia. Wistar bought a large woodland tract and built a cordage pot and glass house, a general store, houses for workmen and a man-

sion house. He paid a sea captain £58 to transport four experienced glass workers from Holland to show him how to convert the fine Jersey sand into splendid Wistar glass.

WISTAR products quickly gained fame after Casper started production in 1740, and prominence of the glassworks continued unchecked when son Richard Wistar took over after his father's death in 1752. In addition to making exceptional glassware, Wistarburg also trained many glassworkers who put their training to good use in establishing other South Jersey glass manufactories.

The German immigrants who came to Wistarburg helped advance religious freedom in Salem County. Catholics who worked for Wistar celebrated mass in June, 1744, in the nearby home of Matthew and Adam Kiger (probably the first formal mass in New Jersey). German Lutherans at the glass works established a church four years later at Friesburg. Other Protestant faiths followed, with all of the religious groups finding a relatively liberal climate among the Quakers.

Salem's long-time reputation as a garden spot attracted the attention of

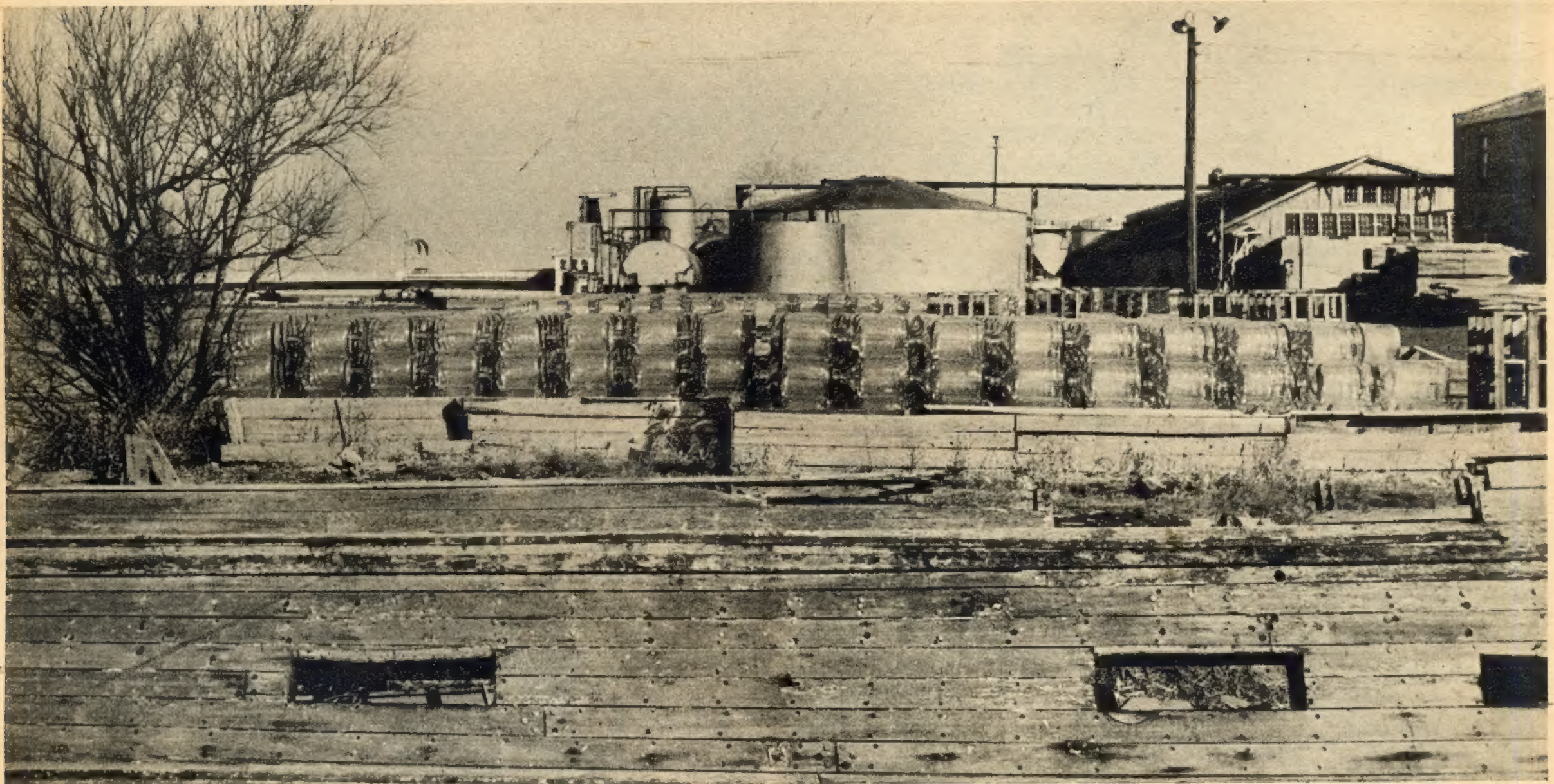
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Historic Hancock House at Hancock's Bridge was massacre scene.



Salem's ancient oak tree on West Broadway is over 400 years old.



Products of Gaynor Glass Works, opened in 1874, in Salem yard.

SALEM COUNTY

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both the American and British armies during the Revolution, with the foraging activities of the two armies erupting sharply in 1778.

First, Gen. Mad Anthony Wayne landed at Salem February 19, seeking cattle (which some farmers promptly hid in the swamps). Undaunted, Wayne and his men collected upward of 300 head in 48 hours and started overland to Valley Forge via Haddonfield and Trenton. Wayne marched his troops between the cattle and the river, to "amuse the British."

The British didn't amuse easily. After Salem beef helped relieve the wretched plight of the men at Valley Forge, Col. Charles Mawhood and Major John Graves Simcoe spread over the county in March to "chastise the rascals" (in Mawhood's words). American troops fell back to a thin line along Alloway's Creek, concentrating on three bridges at hamlets known as Hancock's, Quinton's and Thompson's (Alloway).

A bitter, indecisive skirmish at Quinton's Bridge on March 18 turned back the British. Three days later Major Simcoe led a group of 300 assorted Hessians, Tories and hangers-on against the home of Judge William Hancock at Hancock's Bridge. Some of Simcoe's 300 troops even knew personally the 30 men sleeping in the house on the morning of March 21 when the British force surrounded the house.

SENTRIES at front and rear doors died quickly and quietly from bayonets thrust into their backs in the darkness. Then Simcoe's raiders rushed the house, aroused the sleep-

ing men and chased them into the attic. Blood flowed over the attic boards as the helpless Americans died under savagely wielded bayonets. Simcoe withdrew his troops, satisfied with the night's work; the fortunes of war shifted elsewhere — but darkened blood stains remained on the boards of Hancock's house to recall the murderous night.

Quietude returned to the county sooner after the war than to most parts. Wharves along the creeks buzzed with activity, mills spun busily, traffic picked up over the high road leading to Cooper's Ferry (Camden). Above all, the farmers worked.

HOW they worked! So much so that without warning the weary soil quit in the late 1790s. Bewildered farmers sadly watched wizened crops in the fields. Families left the homes ancestors had built a century before and headed west in the Great Migration. Onward they went seeking the milk and honey—to Ohio, West Virginia, Indiana, on across the Mississippi River.

Leading the march was Zadock Street of Salem city. In 1803 Zadock founded Salem, O.; a dozen years later Zadock and son Aaron founded Salem, Ind., and in the 1820s Aaron founded Salem, Ia. The cross-country trail finally ended in 1844 at Salem, Ore. (Interestingly enough, a Salem, Ore., citizen wrote the mayor of Salem, N. J., in 1916, suggesting that all of the country's other 25 Salems change their names in deference to Salem, Ore. Salem, N. J., laughed the laugh of an old, old grandfather.)

Discovery of extensive marl beds in the northern part of the county



West Main street in Penns Grove, once a Wilmington resort area.

checked the migration before the middle 1820s. Salem farmers again ruled supreme, with Col. Robert Gibbons Johnson of Salem City in the forefront. Col. Johnson, wealthiest man in the county in those days, owned many farms but — like many farmers of the day — lived in town while others worked his land.

Col. Johnson imported the tomato in 1820, at a time when most farmers considered the rich, red fruit at least worthless (and possibly even poisonous). Tradition declares Col. Johnson had to eat one of the "love apples" on the court house steps to get his fellow-farmers to consider the tomato as edible. Highly progressive Col. Johnson helped organize an agricultural society, reintroduced fairs to the county

—and in his spare time wrote a creditable history of Salem County.

Throughout the 19th Century Salem County farmers particularly distinguished themselves by the immense cattle and pigs they raised. Judge William Clawson of Woodstown fattened many hogs to over 1,000 pounds in the 1850s, while Charles Clark of Pilesgrove in 1860 raised 52 hogs averaging over 500 pounds each. Later, Clark Pettit of Hedgefield Farm had the largest herd of breeding hogs in the world.

GREATEST of the overstuffed livestock specimens, nevertheless, was the first of note—the famous ox Job Tyler shipped from Salem wharf to Philadelphia in 1823. A special steamer came



Monument to Confederate dead in Finn's Point National Cemetery.



Gun emplacements and dugouts at Fort Mott, now a state park.

down from Philadelphia to bring the ox up-river and a band led an impromptu parade through Philadelphia streets from dock to market. The ox merited the honors, because when dressed he yielded 2,111 pounds of beef, 365 pounds of tallow and 176 pounds of hide—2,652 pounds overall!

Job Tyler's ox also focused attention on Salem County's growing steamship prominence. Steady service, started before 1830, continued prominently for 60 years. Salem, Alloway, Sculltown, Pedricktown and Quinton's Bridge all spurred from increased steamship business. Penns Grove attracted thousands over by steam ferry from Wilmington for recreation, thousands more to attend the rousing camp meetings in the nearby groves.

Shipbuilding attained importance, particularly at Alloway, where the Reeves brothers started in 1824 to cut planks and timber for Philadelphia shipyards. Seven years later they launched their first boat and in 1844 they built their first steamboat. Many canal boats and sidewheel steamers slid down the ways at Alloway before the Civil War.

SALEM COUNTY'S proximity to the South, as well as the gentle nature of its Quaker settlers, made it play a prominent role in the drama leading up to the Civil War. As early as 1835 a group of Salem city people forcibly took away from a Philadelphia agent eight naked slaves who were being led on chains through the city streets.

The agent received rough treatment, much to the indignation of editors in the City of Brotherly Love, whose thoughts lingered on the agent rather than the slaves. Twenty years before the war broke out hundreds of slaves crossed to Elsinboro Point and started northward to freedom on the underground railroad.

One of the county's daughters, Miss Cornelia Hancock of Lower Alloway's Creek, gave Salem County reason for pride at the Battle of Gettysburg, where she was the first woman nurse to arrive on the field of battle. Closer to home, tales of horror seeped back to the Salem mainland from Fort Delaware on Pea Patch Island in the Delaware River. Finally, in the waning days of 1863, dozens of corpses came to the mainland each day from the fort, where 12,000 Confederate prisoners occupied space intended for 2,000 men.

Fort Delaware deserves a place in the annals of infamy. Dr. S. Weir Mitchel of Philadelphia, a Federal inspector of hospitals, wrote in 1863: " * * * there are a thousand ill * * * there are 20 deaths a day from dysentery and the living have more life on them than in them * * * thus a Christian nation treats the captives of its sword * * * " Underfed, miserably treated and given the scantiest of medical attention, Confederate prisoners died horribly. Nearly 2,500 of them found Salem's peace only in the cemetery at Finn's Point.

THE year of 1863 was a year of destiny for Salem County, because, in addition to the heroics of Miss Hancock and the wretchedness of Fort Delaware, it was the year the railroad finally inched down from Camden. The railroad did two things—it switched the county's main focal point from

Wilmington to Philadelphia and it brought a resurgence of the old Salem glass industry.

Salem Glass Works, founded by H. D. Hall, J. D. Pancoast and J. V. Craven in 1862, became one of the largest hollow glassware manufactories in the world within 10 years after the railroad came. John Gayner opened his glass works in 1874 and at about the same time an oilcloth maker, an iron foundry and two canning companies made Salem city's economy boom. The city population jumped to nearly 5,000, including scores of retired farmers and more than 100 active farm operators who preferred to live in the city.

Glass also became vital to Quinton in 1863, although not until 1893 did the railroad supplant Alloway's Creek boats. Quinton's "golden age" lasted until 1908. For 45 years 3,000,000 feet of the finest French plate glass in the nation came annually from Quinton Glass Works. Western competition killed the plant eventually, but Quinton at least had the distinction of being one of the last places in the East to make window glass.

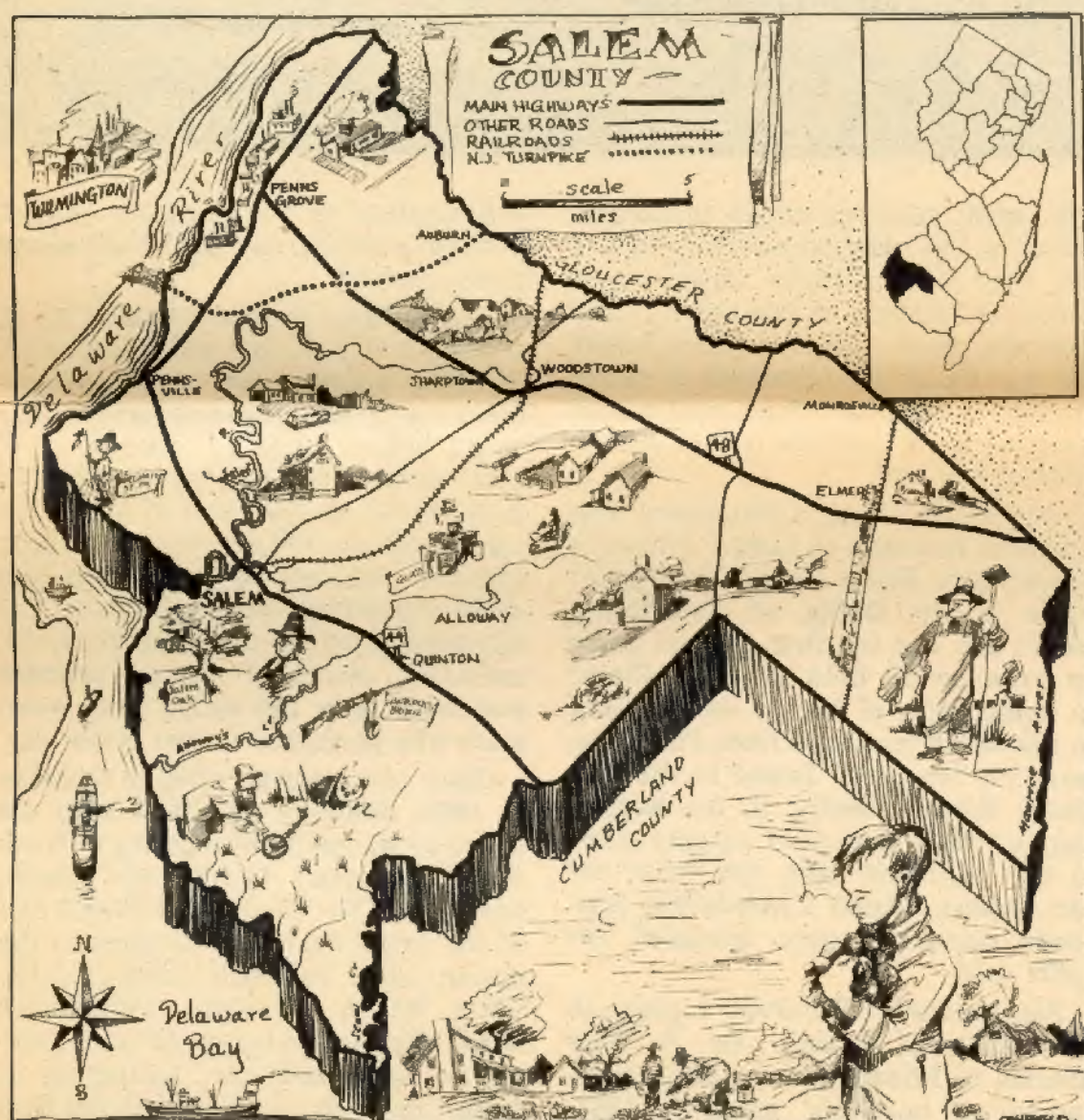
AS the 19th Century waned, farmers in Pilesgrove and Pittstown townships happily applied marl and reaped their rewards. Shad fishermen pulled thousands of fish from the Delaware. Tomato growers found increasing public demand for their "love apples." Noted ice cream makers, particularly John Bruna, made Salem County ice cream famous throughout South Jersey and as far away as Washington, D. C.

Then, one day in 1890, the du Pont company bought land at Carney's Point and announced plans to make smokeless powder. Most Salem historians call that du Pont decision the most important event in the county since

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Mounds in marshes near Hancock's Bridge indicate muskrat colony.



Map of Salem County which has an area of 389.3 square miles.



Dairy farm near Salem, one of the more than 1,400 in the county.

SALEM COUNTY

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the first arrival of the Swedes and Finns 250 years before. Du Pont's first guncotton left Carney's Point in 1892, while smokeless powder for sportsmen was produced in 1894. The Spanish-American War boosted production some but World War I really boomed Carney's Point.

MORE than 25,000 men came to the Point in World War I to help make 900,000 pounds of smokeless powder daily. Farmers and fishermen left their plows and nets—most of them never to return, because at war's end most of them transferred to the "dye works" at Deepwater. The war had cut off German dyes, forcing this country to find substitutes. Du Pont produced them and stayed on in full production, slowly changing to widely varied chemical production.

"Old Salem" gave way somewhat before the industrialization. The two glass factories in Salem city were joined by a big H. J. Heinz canning house in 1906. Floor-covering plants moved into the county. Population increased. Old mud and oyster shell roads disappeared under blankets of macadam. Residential areas like Woodstown and Pennsville grew rapidly. Intensive farming made the fruitful soil produce wonderfully—and the coming of Seabrook Farms to neighboring Cumberland County opened undreamed-of new markets for Salem farmers.

Somehow, though, despite the changes, Salem County has emerged charmingly as the place where John Fenwick's "milk and honey" declarations and his prayer for peace blend nicely with glass manufacture and the chemical works at Deepwater. More than 2,000 people work in the two glass plants in Salem (one is now part of the Anchor-Hocking Co., the other is still called Gayner's), another 7,000 draw weekly checks from du Pont. Out along the Delaware, near Deep-

water, the generating plant of the Atlantic City Electric Co. supplies electric power to most of the counties in South Jersey.

FARMING continues a prime way-of-life, with the county's more than 1,400 farms annually producing more than \$7,000,000 from field crops alone (with tomatoes a major item)—and well over \$13,000,000 each year from all farm products.

The immediate years ahead bid fair to change Salem's outlook (already the Deepwater Bridge and the New Jersey Turnpike seem to be switching the county's axis from Philadelphia back to Wilmington, where it was in the beginning). Industry is an increasingly major economic factor. Hundreds of new residents are bringing new customs into the county—unlike the days when Salem had the reputation of being way off the beaten path.

Yet, what can really change Salem? Scattered throughout the county are at least 100 old brick houses predating the Revolution. Salem city's venerable streets are lined with enough handsome old houses to make an antiquarian drool. Salem's ancient oak makes believable humorist Robert Burdette's declaration that the tree is "four years older than the Atlantic Ocean."

Even the county's towns commemorate the names of original settlers of 250 years ago as town names in few other counties do—such as Pedricktown, Pilesgrove, Quinton, Hancock's Bridge, Woodstown, to name just a few. Out in the marshes surrounding Hancock's Bridge dozens of muskrat trappers still make good livings in a continuation of almost 300 years of unbroken trapping in the marshes.

Above all, Salem seems truly to mean peace in 1953. Since the beginning most men have found relative tranquillity there, even though the man who named it Salem never found on earth the peace he so much wanted.